

■ Professor Claire Rabin



## Artist? Artist! An Experience on a Greek Island

**IT ISN'T** hard for me to say that I am a family and marriage counsellor, nor is it hard for me to say I am a mother, wife, friend or newly retired academic professor. Yet it is very hard for me to say "I am an artist" and for this reason the provocative title of the art workshop I came upon in cyberspace grabbed my attention. "Artist? Artist!" What was this about?

While I love to paint, have taken art workshops a few times in the south of France (which always seemed more about eating than painting), have always found myself sketching and come from a family of artists-the 'chutzpah' to see myself as an artist seemed way out of my reach. I did not know why, but something about that leap into defining myself as an artist was impossible. So the title of artist Peter Seibt's workshop hit in me something waiting to be realized. Well, I do love adventure and the unknown, love Greece and was intrigued and puzzled by the unusual description of his seven-day oil painting workshop in June on Paros, an island in the Cycladic cluster near Naxos. He writes: "What is this workshop?"

It does not concern techniques. How one brings color on the canvas is already known or you will practice if you need it. Who said what about art? Whenever? Where? Which theories do you know that must only be known by those who want nothing else than to talk about art. We do not squat contemplatively around a candle; we do not run over hot coals, we do not sink in daydreams. We only need the map of the theory so that we can move even better in the landscape of creation. No ideologies, no rasters, no gurus.

Artist? Artist! Is a fast, intensive and desireful process, an experience.

1. We begin and
2. From this moment on, you are on the way to...
3. Your own horizon. So to your uniqueness.  
And so to your own work.
4. You permanently discover new substance of yourself, thereby permanently your work changes.
5. You experience yourself and what you create out of yourself. We experience, arrange, sharpen and widen our

perception, encounter blockades and dissolve them, find answers and forget the questions, drag ballast and let it fall, are irritated about sudden discoveries and smile, protest over our difficulties, laugh at the solutions - and we dance... and we work, work, work.

6. And everything in the light of the Aegean, in light and shade with warm days and evenings, with joy and laughter. Therefore it is quite easy, although it seems difficult, it is cheerful and completely concentrated, always open and absolutely in the presence of creation.
7. Everything serves this one goal: "I am unique and so I create."

I sensed I was getting myself into some deep water. The price was quite high and it turned out that I had missed the usual June workshop. I normally would have given up. But when I looked at his work I was transfixed - the color, the imagination, the uniqueness of his style - all said "Go! Go! GO!". I wrote to Peter of my enthusiasm and he said he was willing to do another workshop in September if I get a few people together. I tried, but did not find anyone quite as crazy as myself. Luckily in my efforts to find companions I remembered to forward copies of my emails to Peter, who, caught up by my eagerness, easily found former participants in Europe who wanted to come back. A good sign I thought, and the green light was on for a new 7-day workshop in Paros.

The travelling details were all made easy by Heidi, Peter's wife, who was caring and consistent in her daily mails on how to get to their studio overlooking the harbor of Paros. Yet all the help did not allay fears and anxieties that first day. This obviously was not going to be a "how to draw a cloud" or "how to paint the sea" kind of workshop. But what was it going to be? It was going to be about me, about my real self and my ability to express it.

Peter is a 72-year-old young man who exudes enthusiasm, humor, energy and joy. He has a PhD in psychology, as well as having lived in a Buddhist monastery and a nomad tribe in the Sahara. He has run and consulted to large corporations and has a knowledge of music, philosophy,





art history and Greek dancing beyond any I have come upon. He believes that to find our unique selves and to get into the flow of real painting we don't need technique and knowledge and, as a matter of fact, these only hurt and limit us. He wants us to go to places inside ourselves which exist only in the present moment, are emotional and from there, express our true selves through creating.

Sounds easy? Well, it also appears that Peter is sensitive and aware of how we have all been hurt, blocked, criticized, shamed and frightened by the very idea of showing who we really are. He uses the group process together with art to help us gently and with humor to move back into that place where we all probably started out when we first started to play as children with color. But he is aware that we were all wounded and in this workshop we shared those experiences in which teachers told us our work wasn't good, or that it was too childish, or that we had probably copied it. Tears were shed. We were led in writing a new narrative of our lives "as artists".

From morning till evening we painted from many different places inside of us. We painted our bright sides and our dark sides, our interpretations of each other's paintings and of his paintings. We talked about time, read poetry and danced Greek dances, and mostly painted - always with music in the background. Sometimes opera, sometimes Bach, sometimes rock, sometimes blues and sometimes a song that had been inspired by something said in the group. I don't know how

Peter found it, but after one of my confessions he played something called "I want a Jewish American Princess". Peter was constantly in the Flow, the Zone, that place from the Source in which there is only joy, love and creating. And so it was easy, if also exhausting, to find myself for the first time painting from that place as well.

The seven days flew by as if in a reality of its own. We learned to create something Peter calls our own "horizon" and we physically interact with this creation that expresses our obstacles and our solutions to creating. This interactive board that each person took home is something that we are supposed to continue to feed and then, as Peter says, "it will feed us". Meanwhile my horizon is in my painting room along with the tens of paintings I painted in the workshop. One of his methods is to teach us to keep moving, to make small paintings (sometimes as many as four or six on a large page) so as not to get caught up in trying to perfect any one picture. I saw that all of us produced many paintings that were true expressions but didn't feel special and all of us suddenly came up with something wonderful, exciting, and even thrilling. So his message is to go, go, go...always in the present moment, always moving towards your own unique horizon. Can I do this in daily life? I was worried and wrote Peter yesterday. Today he wrote me: 'Yiassou Claire, yes, very understandable: the climate of creation is needed. I am sure that it will help you most, if you realize your work by our essentials:

- 1 feed the horizon
- 2 be aware of it with open patience before painting
- 3 create an intensive situation out of it.

And no perfection, but sketches, sketches, sketches, small, quick: abundance.' So here I am in Israel, waiting eagerly for next June in Paros and another seven day adventure with Peter, Heidi and anyone else who wants to enjoy life and painting. And meanwhile...Yiassou Peter!

The dates for the 2008 "Artist?Artist?" workshops are as following: April 21-27, June 9-15, September 22-28. For more information on the workshops please go to [www.artistartist.info/artistartisteng/entscheidung.htm](http://www.artistartist.info/artistartisteng/entscheidung.htm)

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